



Al-Risala 1998

May-June

Faith

The essence of faith is *ma'arifah*, (realization or discovery of God). When a man consciously seeks out and finds God, and thereby has access to divine realities, that is what constitutes faith.

This discovery is no simple matter. God is the Creator and Owner of all things. He will award or punish all, according to their deeds; none is free from His grip. The discovery of such a God shakes to the core of the whole life of man. His thinking is revolutionized, for God becomes the centre of all His emotions.

With God as the principal focus of his attention, man becomes God's servant in the fullest sense of the word. He becomes a man whose living and dying is all for God.

Such a faith ultimately results in all of man's behaviour and his dealings taking on the hue of God. When the believer speaks, he is conscious of the fact that God is listening to him. When he walks, he does so with modesty so that his gait may not be displeasing to God. When he deals with people, he is always worried lest he deal unjustly and be punished by God in the next life.

The impact of this degree of faith makes the entire life of man *akhirat-oriented*. In all matters his eyes are focused on the Hereafter. Instead of immediate gain he makes gain in the next life his goal. Whenever there are two aspects of any matter, one pertaining to this world and the other to the next world, he always prefers the latter.

Faith, another name for the recognition of the Supreme God, becomes for the believer a fountainhead of limitless confidence in his Creator. When this recognition takes root in an individual's heart and soul, his whole personality becomes regenerated. Knowing that in all circumstances he may depend upon God, he becomes a new man.

The Mosque in Islam

What is the role of the mosque in Islam? 'Masjid,' or mosque, literally means 'a place for self-prostration,' that is, a place formally designated for the saying of prayers. According to a hadith, the Prophet of Islam observed: "The masjid is a house of God-fearing people." This means, in effect, that it is a centre for the inculcation of reverence, where individuals learn what is meant by piety and are thus prepared for a life of devotion to the Almighty.

The Masjid is built so that people may visit it to read the Book of God, to remember their Creator, silently and in prayer, and to hear His commandments on how they should lead their lives, that is, how to conduct themselves according to His will.

The most important of all these activities is the saying of prayers, a ritual to be carried out five times a day as prescribed by Islam. This act of worship, the greatest means of instilling a sense of awe in the devotee, may be carried out at any place, but ideally, is performed in an organized manner, in congregation, within the mosque. There the worshippers range themselves in orderly rows behind a single prayer leader, the Imam. (The acceptance by the group of just one individual to lead the congregation avoids any dissension which might arise from there being more than one.) The number of the worshippers may be ten or ten thousand: all have to stand in rows behind the Imam. This teaches the lesson of unity. Nevertheless, namaz, in essence, is an individual action. Everyone recites his own prayer and is rewarded on account of its innate rectitude and sincerity.

The prayer begins with ablution, that is, with the washing of the face, hands and feet. This bodily cleansing is a symbolic reminder that the Muslim should lead his life in this world in a state of purification of the feelings and the soul.

What is recited during prayer consists either of verses from the Qur'an or *dhikr*, remembrance of God, and *dua*, invocation and supplications. All of this is aimed at bringing about a spiritual awakening such as will induce the worshipper to renounce his life of ignorance and heedlessness in favour of a life inspired by Islamic moral values.

Throughout the prayer (namaz) the phrase, 'Allah-o-Akbar', 'God is great,' is repeated several times. Implicit in these words is the idea that the person uttering them is not great. Their frequent repetition is a lesson in modesty, designed to rid the worshipper of arrogance and egoism, and turn him into a humble servant of God.

The acts of kneeling down and self-prostration are also repeated several times in the course of the prayer, in symbolic submission before God. In this way, the worshipper is conditioned by namaz to surrender himself to his Maker in all humility.

The various postures in the namaz climax is the act of self-prostration – the ultimate demonstration of submission. Real proof of this submission to God will only become manifest, however, in subsequent dealings with other human beings, in which it is clear that self-glorification has been replaced by glorification of the Almighty, and that feelings of superiority have given way to profound humility.

The namaz ends with each worshipper turning his face sideways and uttering these words: “May God’s peace and blessings be upon you.” Every day, all around the globe, Muslims perform this rite. It is as if they were saying to their fellow men all over the world: “O people, we have no feelings for you but those of peace. Your lives, property and honour – all are safe.” It is this spirit with which worshippers are enthused before they return to society.

Besides the five daily obligatory prayers, there is a weekly Friday prayer which is necessarily offered in the mosque. In practice and content it is just like any other prayer, but since a larger number of people gather on this occasion, a sermon (khutba), giving religious guidance, is also preached by the Imam before the prayers begin. In this, he reminds worshippers of their accountability to God, of the commandments pertaining to Islamic character and of the proper way to deal with others in society. In this way, the Friday sermon refreshes the memory on religious commitments.

The mosque, initially intended as a place of worship, has come to be built to serve other related purposes, such as housing the madrasa, library, lecture hall, guest house and dispensary. According to a hadith the Prophet advised the building of mosques in a simple style, so that there should be no dissipation or dilution of the true religious and spiritual atmosphere.

All mosques (with the exception of three) are of equal religious standing, whether large or small, plainly conceived or architecturally magnificent. The three mosques which have a greater degree of sanctity because of their historical and religious associations are the Masjid-eHaram in Mecca, Prophet’s mosque in Medina and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

Thinking of God in moments of crisis

'Ali, the son of Abu Talib, related how Fatima, his wife and also daughter of the Prophet had to do all the housework herself. Her hands used to become blistered from working a millstone, her clothes became dirty from sweeping the floor, and having to bring water from outside in a large leather bag had left a mark on her neck. On one occasion when the Prophet had an influx of servants, 'Ali suggested to Fatima that she go and request her father to give her one of them to help her in her work. She duly went to see him, but there were many people gathered at his house, and she returned home, without having been able to meet him. The next day the Prophet came to the house of Ali and Fatima and asked what it was she had wanted to discuss with him, but Fatima remained silent. Then 'Ali told the Prophet the whole story. The Prophet did not, however, accede to their request for a servant. "Fear God," he said, "and fulfill your duty to the Lord. Continue to do your housework and, when you go to bed at night, glorify God 33 times, praise him the same number of times and exalt him 34 times. That makes 100 times altogether. That will do you more good than a servant will." (*Al-Targheeb wa al-Tarheeb*)

Best Caller to God's Way

About 1400 years ago the Prophet was forced by the Quraysh tribe to leave his native city of Mecca. He showed the utmost patience and restraint in the face of provocation by the Meccans but finally to avoid confrontation, left the city along with a handful of his followers. In Medina the Prophet was welcomed by the Ansars, who treated the immigrants as their brothers and sisters, and even shared their possessions and properties with them.

In Medina, the Prophet founded the mosque which is today known as the Mosque of the Prophet, himself taking part in its construction. It became the centre of his activities, from which he would preach the message of Islam, sitting for hours on end in order to have the revelations written down and memorised by his companions.

The Prophet laid great emphasis on character building, excellence in moral and social conduct, good family ties and the dignity of labour. Charity was one of the main features of the new society. The Prophet said, "Give alms from right hand, but your left hand should not come to know of it." But over and above giving alms and feeding the poor, the Prophet gave much wider meaning to the concept of charity, as he believed that every good act was a form of charity: smiling at a fellow human being; showing the road to a person who has lost his way; removing hindrances such as thorns and stones from the road; assisting the blind; helping a person to mount his beast; uttering pure, comforting words and replying to questions with mildness. All of these for the Prophet constituted charity.

The Prophet's kindness and merciful nature was unparalleled. Often, when he passed by a group of children, he would say, "Children are flowers of God," and pass his hand affectionately over their heads and sometimes even join in innocent games. He gave special honour and regard to parents: "Paradise lies at the feet of mothers" and "God's pleasure is in the father's pleasure; and God's displeasure is in the father's displeasure." Those, he believed, who served their parents well, were deserving of Paradise. A man once asked the Prophet, "Who rightfully deserves the best treatment from me?" "Your mother," said the Prophet. Then the man said, "Who comes next?" "Your mother," said the Prophet. "Who is after that?" asked the man, "Your mother," was the Prophet's answer. "Who comes next?" insisted the man again. "Your father," said the noble Prophet.

The Prophet gave great importance to family ties. He said, "The best man is he who is best to his wife." Likewise, the best woman is the one "whose husband feels pleased to see her, who obeys when her husband commands and who does not take a stand about herself or her wealth which is displeasing to her husband."

The Prophet always emphasized good relations with neighbours and visiting the sick. He said that on the Day of Resurrection God would say, "O son of man! I was sick, and you did not visit Me." The man would answer, "O my Lord! How could I visit You when You are the Lord of the world?" God would answer, "Did you not know that such and such of My servants was sick, and you did not visit him. Did you not know that if you had visited him, you would surely have found Me with him?"

In a society based on good moral values, evils such as gambling and drinking find no place. Thus the Prophet categorically prohibited gambling and the use of wine and would tell his followers that eating moderately is the best solution to avoid disease: "Do not kill your hearts with excess of eating and drinking." He told them to divide the stomach into three parts: one third for food, one third for water and one third absolutely empty. The Prophet also felt very strongly about oral hygiene. He said if he had not feared putting his followers to trouble, he would have made it compulsory for them to clean their teeth five times daily at every prayer, and emphasized that "cleanliness is half of faith."

Simple living and contentment were the key teachings in his life: "When you see a person," advised the Prophet, "who has been given more money and beauty than you, look then to those who have been given less." In so doing, we will thank God for His blessings, rather than feel deprived. The Prophet's emphasis on moral values was so high that he advised his followers never to say that if people treat us well, we will treat them well, and if people treat us badly then we too will treat them badly. Even if people treated them badly, they had to be well mannered towards them. He also taught them that under no circumstances should they become angry. "The strong man is not one who throws people down, but one who withholds himself from anger."

The Prophet encouraged his followers to earn their livelihood through trade and by their hands and to honour the dignity of labour. A famous saying of his goes: "Pay the labourer his wages even before his sweat dries up." He also said that a trader must be very honest, while selling his goods, he must inform the buyer of any possible defects in the merchandise.

The Prophet's life was marked by simple living and sublime character, prayer and devotion, compassion and humility. After his death, people used to ask the Prophet's wife, Aishah, how he lived at home. "Like an ordinary man," she would answer. "He would sweep the house, stitch his own clothes, mend his own sandals, water the camels, milk the goats, help the servants at their work, and eat his meal with them; and he would go to fetch what we needed from the market."

The Concept of Divine Love

We learn of 99 names of the attributes of God from the Qur'an, some of these being:

Rahman	Most Merciful
Rahim	Most Compassionate
Wadud	Most Loving
As-Salam	Most Peace Loving
Rafiq	Most Gentle
Ghafoor	Most Forgiving
Jameel	Most Beautiful

As these names suggest, God's love for His servants is boundless. It follows that His servants should in like manner show great love and compassion for one another. The hadith endorses this by exhorting all human being to adopt a divine code of ethics based on love and respect for the Almighty and regard and consideration for fellow human beings.

It is certainly incumbent upon all of the faithful to foster a loving, caring attitude towards others and to recognise that, in showing love and compassion to their fellow men, they are following a course of right action, for which they will be rewarded by God in the Hereafter. They must see love as a virtue – a quality to be nurtured and developed.

However, love in Islam is in a different plane from love as defined by secular philosophy. In the latter case, the concept is derived from a study of human being in relation to their worldly lives.

That is why love is given the status of an absolute good in philosophy. But this notion is flawed by a contradiction. This philosophy, which upholds human love as the greatest virtue, cannot provide any explanation for the evils of this world. Viewing evil as an ideologically insoluble problem. It disassociates it entirely from the broader context, in which it may be seen as the obverse side of the coin of love.

Islam, on the contrary, deliberates upon evil as occurring in the absence of love. On the one hand Islam holds love to be a very great virtue, while on the other, it castigates those who commit evil as the greatest culprits in the eyes of God, who will punish them for their misdeeds and deprive them of His love.

The concept of love in Islam is closely associated with the concept of reward and punishment. But the most significant factor in this is God's predisposition to show compassion. He may reward good deeds and punish the wrongdoer, but there is always scope within His scheme of things to look upon sincere repentance and to show His divine mercy. According to a Hadith, God said: "My mercy prevails over My wrath."

Once the Prophet of Islam saw a woman cooking food over a fire, while holding a baby in her arms. The Prophet asked his companions whether they thought it possible for this woman to throw her baby into the fire. They replied never, that could not happen.

The Prophet replied that God loved His servants more than this woman loved her child.

Many illustrations of this point are to be found in the Qur'an and hadith. Thanks to this over-arching attribute of Mercy – as we are told in the Qur'an – those performing an act of virtue will be rewarded ten fold or more but the evil doer will be given punishment only in equal measure and one who sincerely repents will moreover, be forgiven.

God's compassion is so great that no sin is above forgiveness. However much a servant sins, if at any stage before his death he truly repents and seeks God's pardon, all his sins will be forgiven. However in God's court, it is sincerity which is of prime value, not lip service. According to a hadith our deeds are judged by intentions and not perse.

In this connection a very revealing anecdote has been recorded in books of traditions. It is as follows:

There was once a man so aggressive by nature that he became involved in many murders – 99 to be exact. Eventually he realized that he should abandon his aggressive ways and seek forgiveness from his Lord. So he went to a religious scholar and told him that he had already killed 99 people. Could he expect salvation? The scholar replied, "No, after committing such great misdeed, you stand no chance of being granted forgiveness and salvation." The man was enraged at this and killed the scholar there and then.

Sometime afterwards, he went to another scholar and again told him the whole story. This scholar was wiser than the first. He told him that he should not despair of receiving God's mercy. He advised the man to leave the settlement where he lived, as it was inhabited by criminals. That was why he was also turned into a criminal. He suggested that he settle in a certain neighbourhood inhabited only by good people, under whose influence he would be reformed. So the man set off to enter the society of good people, but he was still on his way when he was overtaken by death.

The hadith tells us how this man's case was presented to the court of God where it had to be decided whether he should be forgiven or punished. God asked His angel to measure the path to see whether at the time of his death he was closer to the good neighbourhood or the bad. The angels took the measurement and informed God that he had been nearer to good neighbourhood. At this God pardoned him and he was ushered into paradise.

God is Adil, the Just. So justice demands that people be held to account. But since God loves His servants, He gives them the benefit of the doubt and loses no opportunity to grant them salvation.

There is another very interesting story recorded in the books of hadith about a bad-charactered woman, who neglected her devotions to God. One day, she was walking along a deserted road where she found

a dog dying of thirst. There was no water to be seen anywhere, so she walked some distance to search for a pond or a well. Finally, she found a well, but there was nothing with which to draw up water from it. So she tied one of her shoes to her shawl, lowered it into the well and brought up water in it. She did this several times, each time dropping water into the dog's mouth. In this way, its thirst was quenched and it happily walked off, wagging its tail.

God was so pleased at this act of mercy that He forgave the woman her sin.

This aspect of Islam has been particularly developed among the sufis, for whom the very basis of Islam is in love. Many of their sayings on this subject are regularly quoted. An excellent example is a couplet by Hafiz, the great sufi poet:

We have not studied the stories of Dara and Sikandar
Ask us only about the stories of love and compassion.

Nizamuddin Aulia, the great sufi poet of the 11th century, is said to have told one of his disciples when he brought him a gift of scissors, (a product of his hometown): "The gift you have brought is not a good one! Scissors are meant for cutting asunder. But our task is not to set people apart from one another. The gift which you should have brought, if you really wanted to bring one, is that of a needle and thread, as their job is to unite."

The first verse of the Qur'an: 'In the name of God, the most beneficent, the most merciful,' has been repeated 114 times throughout the text. This shows that Mercy and Compassion are the most important of God's attributes. Besides these 114 times, these words occur at many other places in the holy scriptures.

Islam is thus a religion of love and mercy. The Qur'an is a message of love and mercy from the Most Merciful God to His creatures.

(Farida Khanam)

The Theory of Revolution in Islam

We learn from the Qur'an that the state of a community is changed by God only when its members have themselves moved on to a higher spiritual plane. The Qur'an expresses this with telling simplicity: "God does not change a people's lot unless they change what is in their hearts" (13: 11)

The starting point of the Islamic revolution is, in fact, the individual. From the individual it gradually progresses on to the society or system, instead of starting from the system to the individual. Clearly, Islamic thinking on this subject is diametrically opposed to the communist ideology, which decrees that the individual can be reformed by a change of system. The Islamic view is that when the individual has reformed, society will of itself undergo a transformation.

The theory of Islamic revolution recognizes that the individual is the source of both corruption and reform. Therefore, if the rectification of any aspect of society is sought, the starting point must be the individual and his spiritual wholeness. There is a hadith which gives metaphorical expression to this: "Listen carefully. In the body there is a piece of flesh. If that is healthy, the whole body is healthy. But if that piece of flesh is not in proper shape, the whole body will become unfit. Listen, that piece of flesh is the heart" (Al-Bukhari).

If a social revolution is to be brought about, emphasis must be laid primarily on producing good character: the importance of the good and the right – in thought, word and deed – should, ideally, be inculcated from the very outset. Goodness then becomes the principle upon which all healthy social interaction takes place. This has a generally pervasive effect also on social institutions, which take their moral hue from the individuals responsible for their functioning at all levels.

According to a hadith recorded in *Mishkat*, the Prophet of Islam said that the rulers would be of the same level as that of the ruled. That is, whether a system is good or bad for a society will depend upon the individuals who manage it, and also who are managed by it. In a society formed of good citizens, the system, whatever it may be, will run on just and equitable lines. Conversely, in a society formed of miscreants and moral backsliders, no system per se can conceivably engender social progress, while the system itself, because of the corruption of individuals, will appear to be riddled with iniquities.

The strength of a society and its ability to endure are dependent on the personal worthiness of its member. Each member contributes his individual strength like a brick in a tall building. If the bricks are badly made, so that they erode and crumble, it will only be a matter of time before the entire building crumbles and falls. Can society survive if its constituents are of an inferior moral fibre? They are like the passenger on a ship who bores a hole in the hull without considering that, as a result of his action, ship, crew and passengers will quickly founder. Therefore each and every individual needs to be reformed for

producing a good society. For even a single member of the society can wreak havoc by his acts of perversion.

Clearly, in a society which is entirely riven by corrupt and subversive forces, a revolution is called for. The most salient principle of Islamic revolution is that change must be brought about through peaceful efforts. A transformation can, of course, be effected by the use of violence, but it will in no sense be a positive one. For a revolution to be effective and beneficial, it is vital that it should be carried out peacefully. There is a hadith which says: "God grants to non-violence what He does not grant to violence."

The Prophet Muhammad was eminently successful in bringing about major changes in both religious and secular beliefs and practices throughout seventh century Arabia and the countries surrounding it. The fact that this was done in the most gradual and pacific way, with the minimum of bloodshed, is a matter of historical record. Indeed, the Prophet's life is replete with examples of how to bring about change in an ideally patient and tolerant manner, first of all on a very small scale, then gradually enlarging the scope of activities, and only in the final stages bringing about the thoroughgoing social revolution which, in effect, meant individuals on a large scale bowing to the will of the Almighty. It was only after a very long period of missionary work that the Prophet exhorted people, on the basis of divine revelations, for example, to give up drinking, gambling and adultery. Had he attempted to hasten matters by force or intimidation, people would have reacted negatively and might have decided never to comply with his requests (Al-Bukhari). It is a measure of the success of his persuasive methods that, despite the heavy addiction to liquor in Arab society, regular takers not only gave up the habit, but also destroyed all the pots in which they had liquor stored in their homes. Given the fifteen years of his painstaking work just to condition individuals' minds to the sublimity of surrendering to their Creator, one might say that his method was evolutionary rather than revolutionary.

The Prophet lived on in Mecca for thirteen years after receiving his prophethood. At the end of this period, he migrated to Medina, where he lived for ten years till the time of his death. It is a well-documented fact that during his Meccan period, he was offered kingship, but that he declined it (Ibn Hisham). His reason for denial was that he knew full well that the mere crowning of a man as king would not transform society. Change in society comes about not with the wielding of enormous political power, but through education and awareness. The Prophet therefore continued with great patience and perseverance to educate the people, until the time came when the social and political system was Islamized on its own.

The Desire for Peace

A believer is necessarily a lover of peace. In his mind faith and a desire for peace are so closely interlinked that, regardless of the circumstances, he will strive to the utmost for the maintenance of peace. He will bear the loss of anything else, but the loss of peace he will not endure.

The life that the true believer desires in this world can be lived only in the propitious atmosphere which flowers in conditions of peace. Conditions of unrest breed a negative atmosphere which to him is abhorrent.

But if peace is to be maintained, it calls for a certain kind of sacrifice. That is, when conditions become disturbed, the believer must overlook both the misdeeds leading up to this situation and the identity of the wrongdoers. He must suffer all the harm and injustice done to him without making any attempt either to retaliate, or to bring the miscreants to book, so that a state of peace should continue to prevail. The believer has to be willing to pay this price, so that his pursuance of constructive ends should proceed unhampered.

The believer is like a flower in the garden of nature. Just as a hot wind will shrivel up a bloom and cause it to die, so will constant friction distract the believer from achieving positive goals. And just as a cool breeze will enable the flower to retain its beauty for its natural life-span, so will a peaceful atmosphere enable the believer to fulfil the obligations of divine worship in a spirit of great serenity. Peace is thus central to the life of the believer.

Islam is a religion of peace. And peace is a universal law of nature. That is because God loves the condition of peace, and disapproves of any state of unrest. God's predilection for peace is quite enough reason for the believer also to love peace. In no circumstances will the true believer ever tolerate the disruption of peace.

Qur'an: The Book of God – I

When the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) claimed that the Qur'an was a divine book revealed to him by God for the guidance of man, many did not believe him. The Qur'an to them was a human rather than a divine composition. The Qur'an then threw a challenge to these people asking them to produce a scripture similar to it, if what they say be true (52:34).

Alongwith this, the Qur'an declared in no uncertain terms that even if all the human beings and the jinns made collective and concerted efforts to produce a book like the Qur'an they will all fail miserably in their attempt (17:88).

The Qur'an being an eternal book poses, therefore, an eternal challenge, addressed to all the human beings continuing to be born till Doomsday.

Now the question arises as to the characteristics the Qur'an possesses which renders it inimitable. There are more than one dimension of the uniqueness which finds mention in the Qur'an in the following words:

“Do they not ponder over the Qur'an? If it had not come from God, they would have found in it many contradictions (4:82).

Professor Arberry has translated the Arabic word *Ikhtilaf* as 'inconsistency' . Other rendering of the word include contradiction, disparity and difference.

Total consistency is an extremely rare quality, one which is an exclusive attribute of God. It is beyond any human being to compose a work of absolute consistency. For a work to be free of inconsistency, the composer has to command knowledge which encompasses the past and the future, and extends also to all objects of creation. There must be no shadow of doubt in his perception of the essential nature of things. Furthermore his knowledge must be based on direct acquaintance, not on information indirectly received from others. And there is another unique quality he must possess: he must be able to see things, not in a prejudiced light, but as it is, as they actually are.

Only God can possess all these extraordinary qualities. For this reason, only His Word will remain perennially free of all inconsistency and contradiction. The work of man, on the other hand, is always marred by imperfection, for man himself is imperfect; it is beyond him to compose a work free of contradiction.

Contradictions in Human Reasoning

It is not by chance that the work of man is fraught with contradictions. It is inevitable, given the inherent

limitations of human thought. Such is the nature of creation that it accepts only the Thought of its Creator. Any theory which is not in consonance with His Thought cannot find its place in the universe. It will contradict itself, for it stands in contradiction to the universe at large; it will be inconsistent, for it is not in accordance with the pattern of nature.

For this reason, intellectual inconsistency is bound to mark any theory conceived by man. We shall illustrate this point by several examples.

Darwinism

Charles Darwin (1809-1882), and other scientists after him, developed the theory of Evolution from their observations of living creatures. They saw that the various forms of life found on earth outwardly appeared different from one another. Yet, biologically, they bore a considerable resemblance to each other. The structure of a horse, for instance, when stood up on its two hind feet, was not unlike the human frame.

From these observations they came to the conclusion that man was not a separate species, and that along with other animals, he had originated from a common gene. All creatures were involved in a great evolutionary journey through successive stages of biological development. While reptiles, quadrupeds and monkeys were in an early stage of evolution, man was in an advanced stage.

For a hundred years this theory held away over human thought. But then further investigations revealed that it had loopholes. It did not fully fit in with the framework of creation. In certain fundamental ways, it clashed with the order of the universe as a whole. For instance, there is the question of the age of the earth. By scientific calculation, it has been put at around two thousand million years old. Now this period is far too short to have accommodated the process of evolution envisaged by Darwin. It has been shown scientifically that for just one compound of protein molecule to have evolved would have taken more than just millions and millions of years. There are over a million different forms of animal life on earth and at least two hundred thousand fully-developed vegetable species. How could they all have evolved in just two thousand million years? Not even an animal low down in the evolutionary scale could have developed in that time, let alone man, an advanced life form which could have developed only after passing through countless evolutionary stages.

A mathematician, by the name of Professor Patau, has made certain calculations concerning the biological changes postulated by the theory of evolution. According to him, even a minor change in any species would take one million generations to be completed. From this, one can gain an idea how long a period would elapse before a dog, for example, turned into a horse. The multiple changes involved in such a complicated evolutionary process would have taken much too long for them to have happened during the human lifespan of the world.

As Fred Hoyle puts it, in *The Intelligent Universe*: Just how excruciatingly slowly genetic information

accumulates by trial and error can be seen from a simple example. Suppose, very conservatively, that a particular protein is coded by a tiny segment in the DNA blueprint, just ten of the chemical links in its double helix. Without all ten links being in the correct sequence, the protein from the DNA doesn't work. Starting with all the ten wrong, how many generations of copying must elapse before all the links – and hence the protein – come right through random errors? The answer is easily calculated from the rate at which DNA links are miscopied, a figure which has been established by experiment.

'To obtain the correct sequence of ten links, by miscopying, the DNA would have to reproduce itself on an average, about a hundred million members of the species all producing offspring, it would still take a million generations before even a single member came up with the required rearrangement. And if that sounds almost within the bounds of possibility, consider what happens if a protein is more complicated and the number of DNA links needed to code for it jumps from ten to twenty. A thousand billion generations would then be needed, and if one hundred links are required (as is often the case), the number of generation would be impossibly high because no organism reproduces fast enough to achieve this. The situation for the neo-Darwinism theory is evidently hopeless. It might be possible for genes to be modified slightly during the course of evolution, but the evolution of specific sequences of DNA links of any appreciable length is clearly not possible' (p. 110).

And in any case, as Hoyle had earlier stated, 'Shufflings of the DNA code are disadvantageous because they tend to destroy cosmic genetic information rather than improve it.'

To solve this problem, another theory, called the Panspermia Theory, was formed. It held that life originated in outer space. From there it came to earth. But as it turned out, this theory created new problems of its own. Where in the vastness of space was there a planet or a star with the conditions needed for life to develop? For example, there is nothing more essential to life than water. Nothing can come into existence or continue to survive without it. Yet no one knows of anywhere in the entire universe, except the earth, where it exists. We then had a certain body of intellectuals who favoured a theory of Emergent Evolution, according to which life – or its various forms – came into being all of a sudden. But this theory is empty of meaning. How can there be sudden appearance of life without the intervention of an outside force? So we are back to where we started, with the Outside Force – or Creator – to discount which all these theories were originally invented.

The fact of the matter is, without taking a Creator into account, one cannot give a valid explanation of life. There is simply no other theory which fits in with the pattern of the universe. Being inconsistent with the nature of life, other theories fail to take firm root. It is indeed significant that eminent scholars from various fields have thought fit to contribute to an Encyclopaedia of Ignorance, which has been published in London. The book has the following introduction:

'In the *Encyclopaedia of Ignorance* some 60 well-known scientists survey different fields of research, trying to point out significant gaps in our knowledge of the world.'

What this work really amounts to is an academic acknowledgement of the fact that the Maker of the world has fashioned it in such a way that it just cannot be explained by any mechanical interpretation.

For instance, as John Maynard Smith has written, the theory of evolution is beset with certain 'builtin' problems. There appears to be no solution to these problems, for all we have to go by are theories. And without concrete evidence, there is no way we can back up our theories.

According to the Qur'an, man and all other forms of life have been created by God. The theory of evolution, on the other hand, holds that they are all the result of a blind mechanical process. The Qur'anic interpretation explains itself, for God can do as He wills. He can create what He wishes without material resources. Such is not the case with the theory of evolution, which demands that there should be a cause for everything that happens. Such causes cannot be found, with the result that the theory of evolution is left without an explanation, – in an intellectual vacuum, one might say, while the same cannot be said of the explanation of life offered by the Qur'an.

Political Philosophy

The same has been the case with political philosophy. According to the 1984 edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: 'Political philosophy and political conflict have evolved basically around who should have power over whom' (14/697).

For five thousand years, eminent human brains have addressed their efforts toward finding an answer to this question. Yet they still have not been able to produce what Spinoza termed a 'scientific base' on which to form a coherent political philosophy.

Altogether, there are more than twelve schools of political thought, which fall into two broad categories: despotism and democracy. The first is strongly objected to on the grounds that no good reason can be found for one single individual to tyrannise the entire population of a country or countries. Although democracy has wide popular support, it has also been subjected to sharp criticism on a theoretical plane. The entire basis of democracy is the belief that people are born equal, with equal rights and that they are free. But the problems afflicting democracy are alluded to in the very first lines of Rousseau's *Social Contract*: 'Man was born free and everywhere he is in chains.'

The literal meaning of democracy – word of Greek origins – is rule by the people. But in practice it is impossible to establish rule by all the people. How can all the people govern and be governed at the same time? Furthermore, man is said to be a social animal. Far from being alone in this world with the liberty to live as he pleases, he is part of the body of society. One philosopher puts it like this: 'Man is not born free. Man is born into society, which imposes restraints on him.'

How, then, can a popular government be formed, when all the people cannot have power at the same time? Various theories have been propounded, the most popular of which is Rousseau's i.e. that it should be left to the General Will, which can be determined by plebiscite. So, in effect, government by the people becomes government by a few elected individuals. People may be free to vote as they please, but after they have voted, they are once again subjected to the rule of a select group. Rousseau explained this by saying: 'To follow one's impulse is slavery, but to obey the self-prescribed law is liberty.'

Clearly, this leaves much unanswered. Seeing how easily democratic systems deteriorated into elective monarchies, people were not satisfied with Rousseau's explanation. Once they had secured people's votes, democratically elected rulers began to assume the same role as monarchs had before them.

All political philosophers have been caught up in contradictions of this nature. And there appears no way out of the impasse. In theory, all of them cherish the ideal of human equality. Yet human equality, in the true sense, is forthcoming neither in monarchies nor in democracies. If the one is a dynastic monarchy, the other is an elective oligarchy. In the 18th and 19th centuries, people rose in great rebellion against monarchic government. But free of the yoke of kingly rule, they found that they were not much better off in that they had to resign themselves to rule by a select group of 'representatives of the people,' while the old monarchs had laid claim to being 'representatives of God on earth.' This was the only difference between the two.

Even the so-called 'representation' of the people is open to question. Take the example of the British conservatives who, in one year, won a decisive victory, winning an overall majority of 144 seats. In terms of votes, however, the conservative share of the vote (43%) had fallen since 1979, i.e. as far as seats were concerned the conservatives had won a massive overall majority. But, as far as votes were concerned, they could muster only 43%. Could this be said to be truly representative of the people? Man's failure in this field has been summed up in these words: 'The history of political philosophy from Plato until the present day makes plain that modern political philosophy is still faced with the basic problems.

In both democratic and despotic systems of government, power is handed over to one or to a few select individuals. In neither system, then, can men be said to be equal, not even under democracy, which has failed to produce equality although formulated in its name. Due to inherent contradictions, this system had likewise produced the opposite of what was intended.

In fact, there is only one political philosophy that does not contradict itself, and that is the philosophy put forward by the Qur'an. The Qur'an says, that only God has the right to rule over man: 'Have we any say in the matter? they ask. Say to them: "All is in the hands of God"' (3:154).

The idea of God as Sovereign makes for a coherent system of thought, free from all forms of contradiction. But when man is considered sovereign, there are bound to be contradictions and inconsistencies in the political theories that evolve. The aim of all political theories has been to eradicate the divisions between ruler and subjects. Yet no human system, whatever its nature, has been able to do this. In both the democratic and despotic systems, human equality has remained an unattainable ideal, for power has always had to be put in the hands of a few individuals, while others becoming their subjects. This disparity can only disappear when God is considered Sovereign. Then the only difference that remains is between God and man. He is the Ruler, all are His subjects. All men are equal before Him. There is no division and no distinction, between man and man.

Two Fold Inconsistency

If the different parts of a book contradict each other, the book is inconsistent within itself. If the contents of a book, as a whole, or in part contradict outward realities, the book is externally inconsistent. The Qur'an claims – with justice – to be free of either type of inconsistency, whereas no work of human origin can be free of either. It follows, therefore, that the Qur'an must be superhuman in origin. Had it been written by a human being, it would have inconsistencies in it of the type so frequently found in the works of man.

Contradictions within a work arise basically from the deficiencies of its author. If inconsistencies are to be avoided, two things are essential: absolute knowledge and total objectivity. There is no human being who is not sadly deficient in both of these areas. It is only God who is omniscient, and flawless as a Being, and while works wrought by the human hand are invariably marred by inconsistencies, His book, and His book alone never contradicts itself.

Because of man's inherent limitations, there are many things which, intellectually, he cannot grasp. He is forced, therefore, to speculate, and this frequently leads him into making erratic judgements and unfounded contentions.

Every human being graduates from youth to old age, and when a man grows old, he often contradicts things he asserted as facts when he was young and immature. With age, his knowledge and experience increase, hence his final verdict being at variance with his initial judgements. But even when death finally comes to take him away, he still has much to learn, and often the assertions of his maturer age are proved wrong after his death. Truth is not arrived at purely through experience and reasoning.

Human beings, in addition to making inadvertent and unwitting errors (for the simple reason that they *are* humans, and not God!) are all too prone to make deliberate misrepresentations of facts when they are motivated by the base emotions of greed, envy, jealousy, revenge and fear.

Human moods and passions are often to blame for people turning a blind eye to the truth and falling a prey to faulty reasoning. Love and hate, friendship and hostility all have their influence on human thinking. A man's inability to be dispassionate, his elation or depression, his triumph or despair, his successes and frustrations all colour the quality of his thought. Such fluctuations of mood, caprice and willfulness, can deflect the very best minds from the truth.

The only one who is free of all such caprice and all such limitations is the Almighty. That is why His word is of an impeccable consistency.

Biblical Inconsistency

To illustrate this point let us take the example of the Bible, which, as a book of revelation was the forerunner of the Qur'an.

Initially the Bible was the word of God, but in later years it suffered from human interpolations, with the result that many internal contradictions began to sully its pages. A case in point is the genealogy of the Messiah, which has been given in several places in that part of the Bible known as the Injil, or New Testament. The Gospel according to Matthew begins with this abridged genealogy: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1: 1).

The genealogy of Christ is then given in detail, beginning with Abraham and ending with Joseph who, according to the New Testament was "the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus" (Matt. 1: 16).

When the reader turns to the Gospel according to Mark he finds these words: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark. 1: 1)

According to one chapter of the New Testament, Jesus was the son of a person named Joseph, while another chapter of this very New Testament says he was the son of God.

Undoubtedly, in its original form, the Injil was the Word of God and free of all contradictions. It was only in later years, that human beings made additions of their own, introducing contradictions into a formerly consistent text. The Christian Church has evolved another extraordinary contradiction in order to explain away this contradiction in its sacred book. The description given of Joseph in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1984 edition) is as follows: 'Christ's earthly father, the Virgin Mary's husband.'

Secular Contradictions

For an instance of serious internal contradiction in secular writings, I turn to the works of Karl Marx, who commands an immense following in the modern world. The famous American economist, John Galbraith, has written of him:

'If we agree that the Bible is a work of collective authorship, only Mohammad rivals Marx in the number of professed and—devoted followers recruited by a single author. And the competition is not really very close. The follower of Marx now far outnumber the sons of the Prophet.

But Marx's enormous popularity does not change the fact that his work is little better than a collection of flaring contradictions. For example, Marx considers the existence of class as the root of evil in the world. According to his philosophy, class distinction is derived from the system of private ownership, and the control exercised by the bourgeoisie over the means of production enables them to plunder the lower labouring class.

The solution prescribed by Marx consisted of confiscating the properties of the capitalist class and putting them under the administration of the labouring class. Thus, he claimed, a classless society would come into being. But herein lies the basic contradiction of Marx's philosophy. For what comes into existence as a result of this transfer is not a classless society, but a society in which one class takes over

where the other leaves off. Where one class previously controlled the economy by virtue of ownership, another class now controls it by virtue of administration. Marx's so-called classless society, was, in fact, one in which capitalist ownership was replaced by communist ownership.

What Marx had condemned in one place, he condoned in another. But due to his great antipathy for and antagonism towards the capitalist class, he was unable to see his own contradiction in thought. He was in favour of taking the control of economic resources away from capitalists and entrusting it to officials. But, blinded by prejudice, he failed to see what he was doing. He gave separate names to two different forms of the very same phenomenon: in the one case, he called it plunder of the many by the few, in the other, he termed it 'social order.'

The Qur'an, on the other hand, is completely free of self-contradiction of this nature, and there is absolute harmony in its description/content. Yet, even so, opponents of the Qur'an have tried to prove that there are contradictions in it. All the examples they cite in this regard, however, have absolutely no connection with the case they are trying to prove. They say, for instance, that in the sermon of his Farewell Pilgrimage, the Prophet stated that all men were from Adam, and Adam was from the earth. According to this principle women should enjoy the same status as men. In practice, however, this is not the case, say opponents of the Qur'an. On the one hand, Islam says that men and women are equal, yet at the same time women are allotted an inferior position in Islamic society. They then cite the fact that the testimony of two women is considered equal to that of one man. This is a total misunderstanding. It is true that in Islam the testimony of two women is, under normal circumstances, considered equal to that of one man. But the basis of this rule is not discrimination between the sexes. It is something quite different, as is made clear in the verse of the Qur'an where it has been laid down. The verse deals with the written recording of debts:

'And take two male witnesses. If there are not two men, then one man and two women – you may select the witnesses of your choice. If one woman forgets, the other will be able to remind her.'

The wording of the verse shows quite clearly that the basis of this rule is – not discrimination between the sexes – but rather the memorizing ability of women. The verse alludes to a biological fact – that women are not as good at remembering things as men. This is why, if one is going to accept women's testimony in loans cases, there should be two of them: so that if at any time in the future, they are required to give evidence, one of them should be able to compensate for the other's poor memory.

It is as well to remember here that modern research has confirmed what the Qur'an said – that women's memory is weaker than that of men. Russian scientists have gone into this matter in great detail, and their conclusions have been published in book-form. A summary appeared in the New Delhi edition of the *Times of India* on January 18, 1985, under the caption, 'Memorizing- Ability':

Men have a greater ability to memorize and process mathematical information than women, but females are better with words,' a Soviet scientist says, report UPI. 'Men dominate

mathematical subjects due to the peculiarities of their memory,' Dr. Vladimir Kononov told the Tass news agency.

The Qur'anic rule, far from evincing any contradiction, proves in fact that the Qur'an has come from One who has absolute knowledge of the facts of nature. He sees things from every angle, and so is in a position to issue commandments that are in total harmony with nature.

External Inconsistency

Now we turn to external inconsistency. External inconsistency in a literary work occurs when what it asserts is contradicted by some reality in the outside world. Since man speaks or writes within the sphere of his knowledge, which is marked by human limitations, these fail to confirm to the external reality. We produce here a few comparative examples to illustrate this point.

Certain ancient Arab tribes sometimes killed their children, in most cases female babies, for fear of being unable to feed a large family. It was in this context that the following verses were revealed:

“Kill not your children for fear of want: We shall provide, sustenance for them as well as for you verily the killing of them is a great sin” (17:31).

This announcement of the Qur'an was a sort of a claim. It suggested that the growth in population, whatever may be its extent and degree, will not create a problem of sustenance for man on the earth. That there will be a constant favourable balance of sustenance and human population. That they will be provided for sustenance tomorrow just as they are being provided for today.

Through the ages, Muslims have been endorsing this account as a matter of faith. That is why Muslims do not feel the need to resort to birth control measures. They have left this matter to God, the Provider of subsistence.

One thousand years after this claim made by the Qur'an, the British economist, Robert Malthus (1766-1834) published in 1798 his book, *An Essay on the Principle of Population as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society*, he set forth his famous theory on the growth of population. 'Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio. Subsistence only increases in an arithmetical ratio.'

Simply stated, growth in population and growth in sustenance are not naturally equal. Human population grows geometrically, that is at a ratio of 1-2-4-8-16-32, while the growth of food supplies maintain an arithmetical ratio: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8. Sustenance, therefore, cannot keep up with the astronomical growth in human population. The only solution to this problem, according to Malthus, was for mankind to control its birth-rate. The population should not be allowed to exceed a certain limit. If it did, the number of people on earth would become greater than the amount of sustenance available, ushering in an age of famine in which countless people would starve to death.

Malthus's book made a powerful impression on human thought, winning substantial support among writers and thinkers, and leading to the launching of birth-control and family-planning schemes. Recently, however, researchers have come to the conclusion that Malthus was quite wrong in his calculations. Gwynne Dwyer has summarized this research in an article which appeared in *The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi) on December 28, 1984. The provocative headline read: 'Malthus: The False Prophet.' In it he wrote:

It is the 150th anniversary of Malthus' death, and his grim predictions have not yet come true. The world's population has doubled and redoubled in a geometrical progression as he foresaw, only slightly checked by wars and other catastrophes, and now stands at about eight times the total when he wrote. But food production has more than kept pace, and the present generation of humanity, is on average the best fed in history.

Malthus was born in an age of 'traditional agriculture.' He was unable to envisage the approach of an age of 'scientific agriculture,' in which amazing advances in production would become possible. Over the 150 years since Malthus's death, methods of cultivation have been radically altered. Crops under cultivation are chosen for their particularly high yield. Cattle are able to produce a far higher amount of dairy food than before. New methods have been discovered to increase the fertility of land. Modern machinery has brought vast new areas under cultivation. In technologically-advanced countries of the world there has been a 90% fall in the number of farmers: yet at the same time a tenfold increase in agricultural produce has taken place.

As far as the third world is concerned, 3 billion people inhabit these under-developed countries, but the third world also possesses the potential to produce food for 33 billion – ten times the present population. According to F.A.O. estimates, if the increase in the population of the third world continues unabated, reaching over the 4 billion mark by the year 2000 a.d., there will still be no cause for alarm. The increase in population will be accompanied by an increase in production: the means will be available to provide food for 1½ times more than the number of people who have to be fed. And this increase in food production will be possible without deforestation. So there is no real danger of a food crisis, either on a regional or on a universal scale. Gwynne Dwyer concludes his report with the following words: 'Malthus was wrong. We are not doomed to breed ourselves into famine.'

Where Malthus's book on population and sustenance – the work of a human mind working within the confines of time and place – was very far out in its predictions for the human race, (and this was proved to the world just 150 years after the author's death) the Qur'an, on the other hand – the work of a superhuman mind – still bears out external realities to this very day.

(To be concluded. . .)